

# ONLINE MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA

Case: Mediterranean Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Traditional companies and especially in European countries such as Greece, lack the knowledge and motivation in order to move away from the traditional marketing methods to more revolutionary ways, such as online marketing.</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis is to explain what is online marketing and the importance of a sound presence on the social media. It also sets as a marketing plan, proposals on how the hotel in question should act in order to strengthen their presence in the Online and Social media.</p> <p>Throughout the thesis, qualitative research is being used. The methods used for the research are Cross-Case Analysis, Benchmarking and Desk Research. The research is focusing on how other companies are conducting their marketing in Online Media and then suggests similar steps to achieve better presence there.</p> <p>The result of this research shows how inexpensive but profoundly effective is to have a concise marketing plan for a company's website and social media accounts. It shows that companies that have adjusted their budget to include Online Media into their marketing plan accept a great amount of attention from existing and potential customers. The research also shows that with simple steps the hotel in question can also succeed in setting an effective message to existing and potential customers in the online world, thus gaining growth and profit.</p> <p>In conclusion, more and more companies begin to see the importance of Online Marketing and Social Media, therefore improving their presence on the Internet. The competition is growing bigger every day but if companies continue to seek innovative approaches in marketing they can establish a trust relationship with existing and future customers.</p>		
Keywords marketing, online media, social media, online marketing, content marketing, website, hotel		
Miscellaneous		

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# 1. Introduction

As we move through the age of technology, we see from tech companies, to start-ups but also traditional brick & mortar companies, adopting new and innovative ways of conducting business. Many companies have reduced their traditional marketing methods (printed means) and moved to new ways of marketing. Companies are now trying to gather fans and extend their user base on social media like Facebook, interact with users, to win their attention and influence their buying decisions to their gain.

In the last years we have seen great shifts. Social Media have revolutionized the way people interact with each other, something that companies have noticed and begin to think of ways to engage with them. Early adopters saw the potential gain of moving much of their marketing focus on non-traditional tools, and they have seen an extended growth in their business. For many traditional companies i.e. Coca Cola, a great amount of their marketing budget is aiming social media and websites, which has results we can observe just by logging into their pages in Facebook.



*The Coca Cola page on Facebook attracts an extraordinary number of 40.6 million of users as of 19.03.2012.*

If we take as an example another Social Media service and another company we can observe similar trends. Let's observe the Twitter account of Samsung Mobile. The company has released a series of smartphones, using the Android Operating System of Google, and has gained huge popularity in the markets across the globe. From their Twitter account, they give updates that are seen by more than 1 million of twitter users, a massive number of leads for a potential marketing message.



*The Samsung Mobile account in Twitter. Users following this account overpass the 1 million users, a growing number as of 19.03.2012.*

Inspecting those examples, we have to keep in mind that those companies do not only gather users by just having accounts to those Social Media. They interact with their fans or followers on a daily basis keeping them alert with updates, campaigns, happenings & events and many times they also organize online competitions with products as prizes. These observations lead to the purpose of this research which will be explained in the following chapters.

### ***1.1. Objectives of the research***

This research as a Bachelor Thesis aims to set a guiding step for the Mediterranean Palace Hotel, to use and develop for the services they run on the internet.

Such services include;

- The website of Mediterranean Palace Hotel
- Social Media accounts

Developing these tools and making them better, is a step to further the success for the company. Mediterranean Palace Hotel can use this plan as a guide to develop new ideas and concepts, to improve what they already do, and to acquire more expertise on the field of online marketing, an exponentially growing field.

In this research the outcomes will be many, but in the core essence, a common ground is established between the company and the author as a student. Acquiring knowledge, and implementing tools in the area of Online Marketing

During this research I intent to comprehend the knowledge of basic marketing concepts and concepts of the online marketing, how to use marketing in the world of Social Media (such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc), gain knowledge concerning current trends in online marketing and guiding tools to develop concepts into actions.

At the same time in the end of this research, I should have created a set of tools for the hotel to use for their marketing in the Online Media. In the next chapter I am going to introduce Mediterranean Palace Hotel and some facts provided by the management of the company (markets, demographics, SWOT analysis etc).

## ***1.2. Mediterranean Palace Hotel, Thessaloniki***

The Mediterranean Palace Hotel is a five-star hotel in Thessaloniki, with 111 rooms and seven suites, all carefully decorated and equipped with modern amenities, close to the traditional area called "Ladadika" with stunning views of the Gulf of Thessaloniki. It is considered one of the most luxurious hotels of the area and it is well known in the city.

- 111 rooms
  - Available rooms for disabled people
- 5 Junior Suites
- 1 Executive Suite
- 1 Presidential Suite
- Amenities (pay TV, ADSL internet connection, working desk etc)

Some other services that they offer to the clients are:

- Restaurant
- Café Bar
- 8 Multiple function conference rooms
- Wireless Internet connection
- Secretarial Services
- Private Parking
- Dry cleaning services
- 24 hour Room Service
- Currency exchange
- Car Rental
- Baby Sitting
- Hair Dresser, Doctor and Masseuse on call
- Valet Services



Below we can observe a table that lists the facilities of the hotel and some facts in numbers concerning their square meter space and the amount of people then can fit in, depending on the occasion.

Hall & provision	m <sup>2</sup>	Theatrical	School	"Π" Shape	Event	Cocktail
Dias	300	400	250	100	300	450
Ifigeneia	160	190	120	50	140	180
Naysika	86	100	60	40	72	90
Ifigeneia & Naysika	246	-	180	-	180	250
Poseidon A	86	80	50	35	72	100
Poseidon B	54	35	25	22	48	50
Poseidon A & B	140	115	75	-	120	150
Apollom	90	110	70	50	96	120
Restaurant DIPLOMATICO	115	-	-	-	80	-
Apollon & DIPLOMATICO	205	-	-	-	164	-
Hermes	17	10	-	-	-	-

To further analyze those figures, an explanation is needed for the organization of the halls. A theatrical arrangement is the organization of the seats in such way that they imitate the ancient Greek theatre. A "school" arrangement is the organization of the seats in a hall with small desks for every 2 or three persons, depending on the scale of the event. A "Π" arrangement is an arrangement that imitates the letter pi of the Greek alphabet. An event varies from a large scale symposium with seats for many people and a stand for the speakers, to a wedding ceremony with tables and served or buffet food.

Continuing the introduction of Mediterranean Palace Hotel, I am going to explain the current situation in the hotel industry in the city. In order to accomplish that, figures from the marketing department of the hotel have to be analyzed in order to have a complete image on the hotel, its marketing strategies and demographics.

### 1.2.1. Current Situation

The company (under Dedeoglou Serafeim) owns 2 hotels totally (Mediterranean Palace Hotel, and Grand Hotel Palace), with a medium size number of employees. Both of the hotels are designed as five star hotels and they provide accommodation, leisure and conference services.

Currently the market is depressed due to the economic crisis in the country in general. However the company makes various efforts to promote their activities, improve their services and bring more customers. As mentioned above the hotel uses many of the traditional marketing methods and through online and web tools they will try to enhance their presence in the field.

Through the recent years (mainly after 2007) the prices on the room rate have seen a deep fall in the respect of 10% until now. This is due to the fact that customers have tightened up their pockets because of the economic crisis, plus competition has made it so that prices have to fall to maintain a competitive level in the city of Thessaloniki.

The hotel mainly depends on B2B connections (conferences, meetings, accommodation). The strongest aspect of the hotel is its links with the business sector in various fields and mainly through the services provided, the hotel enjoys a long term relationship with satisfied customers who use the hotel for their accommodation, meetings and events.

A smaller but bit strong dynamic market is group accommodation, which predominantly can be identified as leisure tourism. Groups get offers for lower prices per person. Although this is not as profitable as straight-forward business deals, it is really helpful especially in low-season periods when the occupancy reaches below 20% numbers.

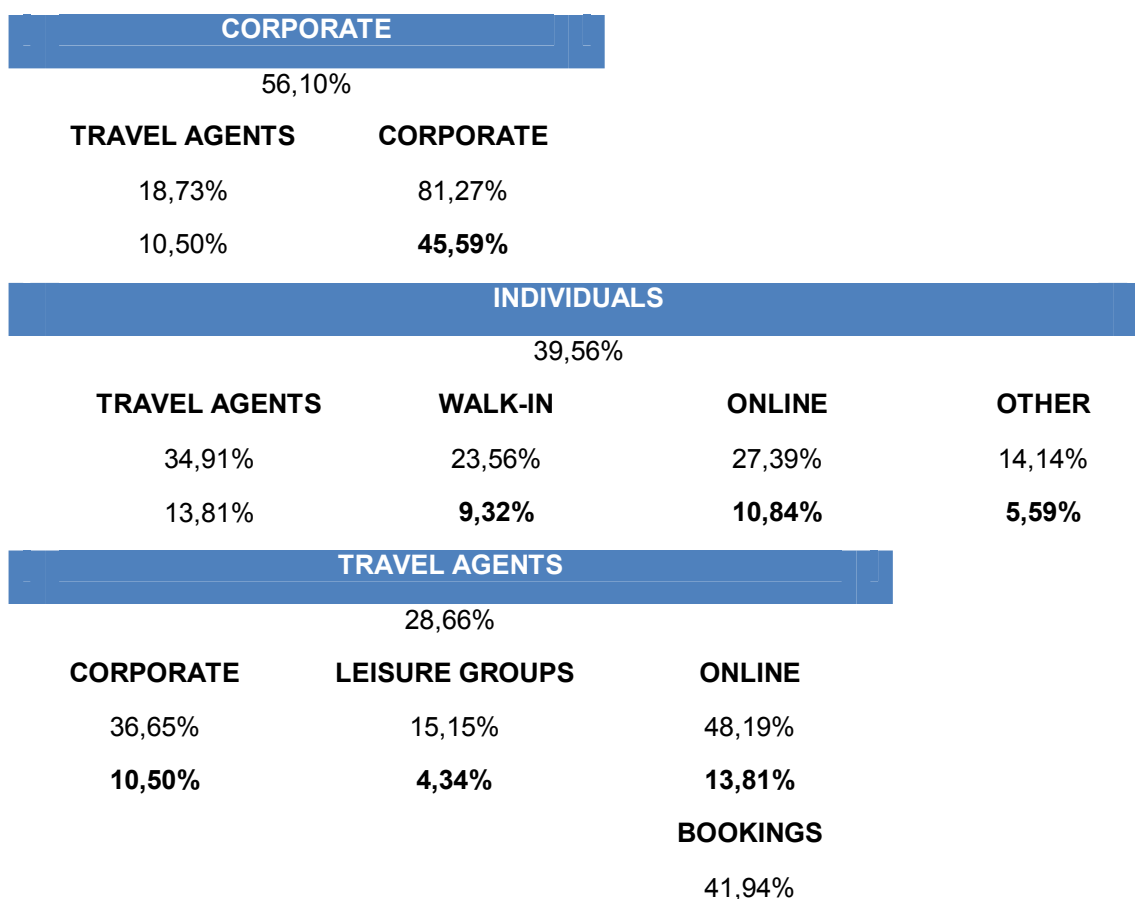
### **1.2.2. Market demographics of customers**

Below there are some numbers given (provided as an insight from the management of the hotel). We see the demographics of the customers in the past years. The customers are divided into 3 distinct categories: Corporate, Individual and Travel Agents. The latter means, people who come as groups mostly, or generally leisure tourists whose trip is organized by a partnering travel agency.

### Market sectors of the Mediterranean Palace Hotel:

- Corporate: 56.10%
- Individual: 39.56%
- Travel Agents: 28.66

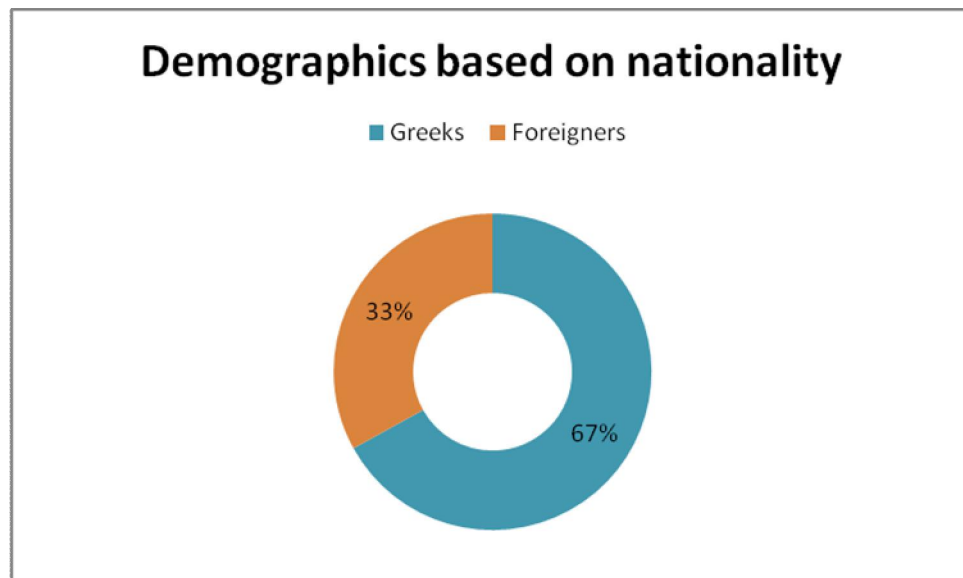
Divided into the 3 categories of clients, the charts below show statistics on how the customers are booking their accommodation on the hotel. The most common ways are through Travel Agents, Personal Bookings, Online, and Walk Ins. A “walk in” is a customer who is going to the hotel to book a room for accommodation on the fly (without prior booking through phone or online). Most of “walk ins” are usually checked in for one night.



While keeping in mind this we can also check out the nationalities of the customers staying in 5\* (five star) hotels in Greece.

<b>Five Star Hotels</b>	<b>12</b>	
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<b>Beds</b>	3054	
<b>Overnight stays</b>	465.892	
<b>Greeks</b>	312.158	67%
<b>Foreigners</b>	153.734	33%



*Graphic chart based on the statistics provided by Mediterranean Palace Hotel.*

### 1.2.3. Competition in the area of Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki is the second biggest city in Greece. Active businesses in the city and international interests have made the city a place with a lot of business activity. The need for hotels, with amenities for business people and travelers, made hotels to rise from 30 years ago to this day. These days, the city hosts around eleven 5 star hotels. Many of them are direct competitors and others fall in the indirect competition.

As an overview we can check some of the hotels of the area of Thessaloniki along with the star rate Mediterranean Palace Hotel is excluded as it is the subject of this research.

- Electra Palace (5 stars)
- Les Lazaristes Domotel (5 stars)
- Macedonia Palace (5 stars)
- The Met (5 stars)
- Grand Hotel Palace (5 stars)
- Daios Luxury Living (5 stars)
- Holiday Inn
- The Excelsior
- Andromeda Hotel (5 stars)
- Anatolia Hotel (4 stars)
- The City hotel (4 stars)
- Egnatia Palace (4 stars)
- Capsis Hotel (4 stars)
- Devitel – Tobacco (4 stars)
- Hotel Panorama (4 stars)
- Minerva Premier Hotel (4 stars)

### Direct Competition

Mediterranean Palace Hotel faces direct competition by many hotels in the city that offer essentially the same services. Three major competitors of the hotel are: Electra Palace, Macedonia Palace and the Met. The two first hotels are of the same style, classical hotels, and they are offering what Mediterranean Hotel Palace offers to customers. They are essentially old, meaning that they are quite some time around the city and therefore they have a strong presence in the city, with a huge clientele and strong networks. The Met is a new hotel, with a futuristic design which was built on a basis of contemporary design, and has more services to offer.

### Indirect Competition

As indirect competition the hotel can identify hotels that have less services, limited conference abilities and lower quality of services, but they offer lower prices which attracts various types of clients. Hotels such as Porto Palace, which is a four star hotel threat Mediterranean Palace Hotel because of the low rate of prices they can offer, plus they are located on the center of the city as well, which make them a strong asset in competition.

### 1.2.4. Swot Analysis of the hotel

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quick Response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost problems to room renovations</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Well structured customer service</li> <li>• Reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited conference possibilities</li> <li>• Limited number of staff</li> <li>• Lack of facilities (jacuzzi &amp; spa)</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prices for customer needs</li> <li>• New market potentials</li> <li>• Improving Internet presence</li> <li>• Advertisement</li> <li>• Outsourced Sales staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Boredom of old customers</li> <li>• New hotels with extra facilities</li> <li>• Economic Crisis</li> <li>• Human Resource cuts</li> </ul>

Starting with strengths, the hotel realizes that the hotel has a well structured customer service. This means, that customer service is delivered with high quality so that the customers are always pleased. A key aspect and strength of the hotel is flexibility and the ability to discuss and negotiate prices and offers with customers depending on needs and ability to deliver a certain service.

Moving on to weaknesses we immediately see as an important factor the limited number of staff. This is of course understandable as with the current economic crisis budgets are extremely tight and so, staff seems to have to lift the weight of overload of working tasks for the few. Nevertheless this is a weakness that can hit backdoor if there are delays and inability to deliver a specific service due to time limits.

To continue with the analysis, we can move to the opportunities which we can focus on the improvement of the Internet presence. Greece has a history of late adopters of such technology but the companies are learning fast and the internet gains a strong potential in the country as well. Therefore it is crucial to improve the presence and the image of the hotel; as such actions can really become a profitable window to the company.

At last, going through the threats, we focus directly on competition and the entry of new hotels with more services to offer, a subject also explained previously. While keeping in mind the economic situation, and understanding the problems that hotels face to compete with new comers, they do hold a strong clientele. Of course this works as well vice versa, as existing customers of the hotel could prefer a new experience from a new hotel because of boredom of existing services.

As an example we see the Met hotel, which is a new hotel in Thessaloniki and it has improved amenities compared to the other hotels, updated equipment and extra services such as SPA and Jacuzzi. It is also a futuristic style hotel with a touch that aims to young generations, while keeping luxury in mind. Therefore competing with such companies is not an easy step and to do something to win the market is as crucial as it can be nowadays.

### 1.2.5. PESTEL Analysis in Greek Tourism and Accommodation

Political	Economical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High taxation (23% in Food &amp; Beverages)</li> <li>• Labour Laws</li> <li>• Environmental Law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Payment</li> <li>• Cost of Capital</li> <li>• Financial Issues               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ growth, interest rates</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Social	Technological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labours</li> <li>• Hierarchy</li> <li>• Age distribution</li> <li>• Career Attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and Development</li> <li>• Automation</li> <li>• Outsourcing</li> </ul>
Environmental	Legal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental impact</li> <li>• Climate change               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ impact on customer orientation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer law</li> <li>• Antitrust law</li> <li>• Health and safety</li> </ul>

According to the Oxford University Press; “There are many factors in the macro-environment that will affect the decisions of the managers of any organization. Tax changes, new laws, trade barriers, demographic change and government policy changes are all examples of macro change. To help analyze these factors managers can categorize them using the PESTEL model” (oup.com, 2012).

Political factors written above such as high taxation and labor laws can be seen as main issues in the environment of the company. For example the high taxation on food and beverages issued on 2011 by the government, has pushed hotels to rethink their pricing on services such as restaurant and bar



services. Whereas in five star hotels, the prices become high as they are profitability driven companies, with such legislation the prices have to remain the same and services or products offered have to absorb the high rate of taxation.

In the economic factors, we see budget cuts and cost cuts, from changing suppliers to outsourcing services. Therefore issues such as employee satisfaction, payment and such, become major problems in the companies. Additionally, the cost of capital due to the economic crisis is in a risk and the companies have been on a strictly tight budget ever since the start of crisis.

In social factors, we see issues such as age distribution and hierarchy schemes. For example in hotels that the working dynamic, ergo employees, is of old age, there might be issues in boredom of service deliverance.

Technological factors show us the impact of new technology and how it affects our lives and thus companies as well. To mention an example, technology drives traditional marketing into the online world. This action makes marketing expert to rethink concepts and create new marketing strategies. We see nowadays an extra interest in social media which is an online society of people with worldwide or national potential, depending on specific interests of companies.

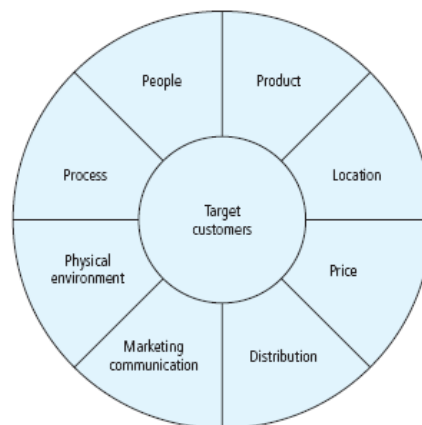
Going to the environmental factors we see the trends and growing awareness in climate and the environment in general. Conscious customers book their vacations according to information about environmentally friendly hotels and premises that have environmental laws and certificates in place.

Finally in legal issues we see how consumer law governs actions of companies, also in the tourism business. Per se, companies and hotels apply high quality of services delivered to the customers. This happens because of

recent trends of awareness and unions that ensure the quality of services and has to be delivered to the customer.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In order to create a development plan we need to know the steps to take for the research. Since this is a marketing research, we are going to need the marketing mix model to get to the point of the study. To understand the marketing mix I have found a descriptive theory in the book Hospitality Marketing; *“The term **marketing mix** is used to describe the tools that the marketer uses to influence demand. The marketing mix is a core concept in marketing”* (Bowie et al 2004, 26). To better understand this visually the authors of the book provide a chart like picture of the marketing mix, seen below



*The hospitality marketing mix*  
(Bowie et al 2004, 26)

To show a clear example of what the main areas of marketing consist (known as the 4P's, below there is a chart from the book Principles of Marketing. In the chart we see the 4p's as categories and we see what is enlisted under them.



*The 4p's chart (Kotler et al, 34)*

In the chart we have an overview of the 4P's, which are; Product, Promotion, Price and Place. Marketing mix is defined best in the book Principles of Marketing; *"Marketing mix—The set of controllable tactical marketing tools – product, price, place and promotion – that the firm blends to produce the response it wants in the target market"* (Kotler et al 2005, 34).

Presuming that the hotel has already an ongoing marketing plan, in this research I am going to focus on the Promotion which is one of the tools of 4P's. To quote again from the book Principles of Marketing ***Promotion*** means activities that communicate the merits of the product and persuade target customers to buy it" (Kotler et al 2005, 34).

Such activities can be:

- Advertising
- Sales Promotion
- Communication
- Personal Relations
- Word of mouth

As indicated, these activities are things that promotion encompasses, and in the communication criteria is where Online Marketing and Social Media come into play. This is going to be the focus of this research as well. Going through

the marketing mix, we drive all the way through the marketing mix to lead the focus on the Internet trends of marketing.

In order to accomplish that, however, we need a clear definition on Online Marketing and Social Media. The research is going to focus on the concepts of the online marketing and the steps the company needs to take to accomplish the desired results.

## ***2.1. Online Marketing***

In the book *Online Marketing – A customer-led approach*, we find a coined definition of what online marketing really is. *“Mohammed et al (2001) define Internet Marketing as ‘the process of building and maintaining customer relationships through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products and services that satisfy the goals of both parties’”* (Gay et al 2007, 6). I would describe Online Marketing as the process of creating meaningful relationships with customers and engaging them through available tools of the online media to gain incentive. And online marketing has various tools of engagement. As part of the Online marketing, in the current years, we see also the birth of new interaction channels that have made communication with customers and companies extremely easy. These channels are the Social Media.

## ***2.2. Social Media***

To explain the definition of **social media** I am going quote the book, *The Social Media Bible*. *“From a business perspective, social media is about enabling conversation. It is also about the ways that this conversation can be prompted, promoted, and monetized”* (Safko et al 2009, 4)

To further continue the explanation of social media the authors give us a more concise definition: *“Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviors*

*among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios” (Safko et al 2009, 6)*

Social media has changed the way people interact with each other and so, they have changed the way companies thinking about marketing techniques. From traditional advertising in the past years, which was happening also in the internet, we have seen a shift to interaction.

Although advertisement stays a strong aspect of Online Marketing, Social Media have shown that engagement with the customer, interacting with them and give them incentive works a lot better and efficient. Such interaction can be identified as Content publishing, which will be discussed further into the study.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1. Defining the problem***

To quote the famous scientist and a genius of his time, Albert Einstein; *“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”* Taking this quote into practice in this current matter, we must say that we cannot think about online marketing budget-wise. Existing trained personnel could put in practice a strategy that would not cost money.

This study also aims to help the hotel as a strategy for engaging the online media, so that the management could start working on it efficiently and without any prior budget. However, the hard truth is that most of businesses tend, and most of the times without their knowledge, to think budget-wise and HRM-wise.

In this study, I will not take into consideration, budget or HRM problems. They can be considered if needed later on by the hotel, after reading this study. As it will be explained further on throughout the study, using online marketing and social media is a relatively small budget marketing campaign. Tools of Online Marketing are used by world class hotels and other businesses in general.

So to define the problem at hand and the reason for this research, we need to think in terms of adapting in the internet era. A statistical table of usage of the internet in Greece shows the desperate need for having such tools. A website called internetworldstats.com keeps track of the usage of internet around the world and gives some interesting results. Below we can take a look at a table that shows statistics of internet usage in the country.

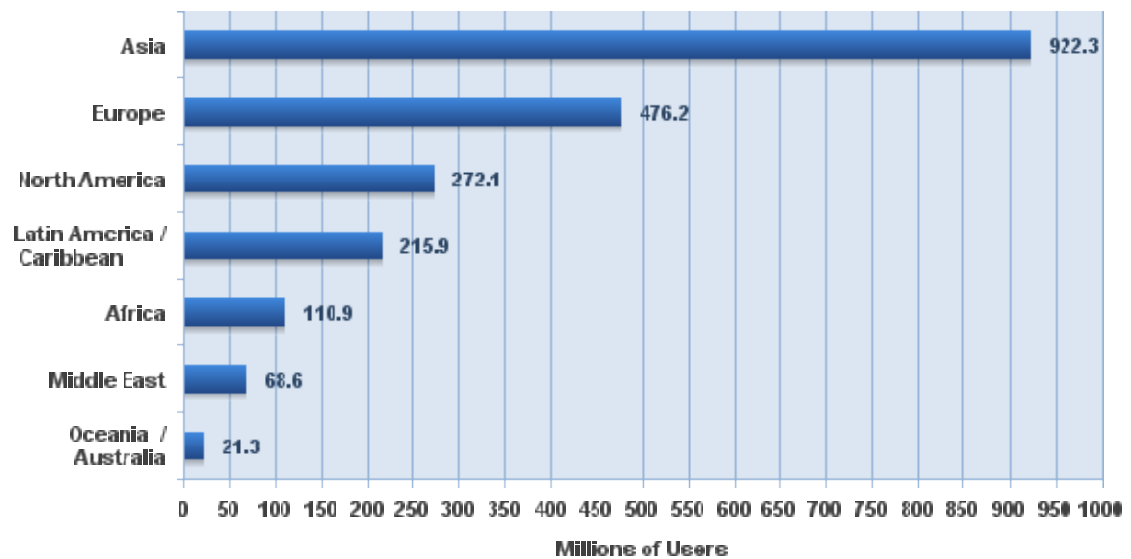
YEAR	Users	Population	% Pen.	Usage Source
<b>2000</b>	1,000,000	10,964,019	9.1 %	ITU
<b>2006</b>	3,800,000	11,338,624	33.5 %	Comp. Ind. Almanac
<b>2010</b>	4,970,700	10,749,943	46.2 %	ITU

*Internet Usage in Greece, from 2000 to 2010 (International Telecommunication Union)*

The statistics in the website are taken directly from ITU (International Telecommunication Union) of the United Nations and Computer Industry Almanac Inc. As shown into the table in 2010 the rate of internet usage was risen to 46.2% almost half of the population of the country. In 2011 however the percentage is most likely by around 10% more risen compared to 2010.

The image below shows us the rate of internet usage per continent and thus, the potential need for a strong image on the web. The numbers show estimations of at least two billions of users worldwide (2.095.006.005 on March 31, 2011, according to Internet World Stats).

### Internet Users in the World by Geographic Regions - 2011



*The usage of internet around the globe (continents). Source: Internet World Stats,  
[www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm)*

Summarizing the aforementioned figures and facts about internet usage, we realize where the problem actually lies. Greek companies are not early adopters in the technology of the internet. As the usage of internet in Greece increases exponentially, we see companies struggling to adapt to the trends that the Internet has pushed societies into. Nowadays, more and more companies are starting to comprehend and realize that actions are needed, in order to build online presence. However not so many hotels in Greece at the moment, rely on Online media, and most of them, if not all, heavily comply to the standard media for marketing such as: printed materials, advertising media, in-house marketing, and networking. While most of those ways are proven effective, printed materials per se, are considered outdated, unsustainable and really expensive to implement.

### **3.2. Research methods used in the research**

This study works as a plan aiming to give Mediterranean Hotel Palace a basic overview on how the social media works and showcase some of the best practices. For the purpose of this study I am finding sources on books and online. Articles, research studies and books as well as concepts by hotel experts in modern marketing methods, give us tremendous feedback on how a company should use its online tools according to the best practices.

During the period that I have been searching for the most suitable methods to aid my study I came across a couple of them that would fit my plan, and I have chosen the best that will service the course of actions I propose. The two methods I will be using during this study will be: Literature review, cross-case analysis and benchmarking.

#### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Samia Khan and Robert VanWynsberghe in a recent case study, try to put together what makes the Cross-Case Analysis worth using for research, and explain the theory further to back it up. According to S. Khan and R. VanWynsberghe (Cultivating the Under-Mined: Cross-Case Analysis as Knowledge Mobilization, 2008): *“Cross-case analysis enables case study researchers to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, seek or construct an explanation as to why one case is different or the same as others, make sense of puzzling or unique findings, or further articulate the concepts, hypotheses, or theories discovered or constructed from the original case. Cross-case analysis enhances researchers' capacities to understand how relationships may exist among discrete cases, accumulate knowledge from the original case, refine and develop concepts (RAGIN, 1997), and build or test theory (ECKSTEIN, 2002).”*



As we progress further into the study we will see after analyzing every aspect of online media, we find cases of companies that do outstanding marketing actions towards engaging their customers and prospects. With cross-case analysis I try to compare the most workable examples for what the hotel could do as well, in order to facilitate a stage for using Benchmarking and keeping the best of the cases that suit the needs of the hotel specifically.

### **Benchmarking**

One definition found in the book Benchmarking – Research and Evaluation describes benchmarking as: “...*a process of industrial research that enables managers to perform company-to-company comparisons of processes and practices to identify the ‘best of the best’ and attain a level of superiority or competitive advantage...*” (Cheney 1998, 1).

The other definition suggests that benchmarking is: “...*a continuous, systematic process for evaluating the products, services, and work processes of organizations recognized as industry or world leaders*” (Cheney 1998, 1).

Therefore benchmarking is a concept that will help me during this study, to evaluate the ways companies use their online marketing and social media channels, and gather the successful stories to present as examples, or steps the hotel could take as well.

In conclusion, using Cross-Case Analysis, Benchmarking and Desk Research will help me gather the theory behind online marketing in addition with cases of companies who has implemented successful methods of conducting their marketing online, and present a sound solution for the hotel. The hotel then can use this solution (or steps to take towards online marketing) to improve their channels on the internet and hopefully gain something out of this.

## **Desk Research**

I have considered that using Cross-Case Analysis and Benchmarking, would get strengthened by the backing of studies and articles conducted for this matter. This is why I have chosen Desk Research to accompany the two other methods.

In order to understand the Desk Research I am quoting Mr. Forsyth from his book: *Demystifying Marketing: A Guide to the Fundamentals for Engineers*. “There is no point in reinventing the wheel – it is costly and time consuming. If data exist, they should be used and not collected afresh. Desk research is the collection, sifting and interpretation of published data. It plays a part in most surveys, even if only to use the known breakdown of the population to guide the selection of a quota sample...”(Forsyth 2007, 53). “This is an area where the ongoing IT revolution has created many new options” (Forsyth 2007, 54).

It is critical to understand that in such study reviewing the huge amount of articles and sources concerning Online Marketing and Social Media would take years to process. However I have chosen articles based on my personal knowledge to the subject as well as on comparison with other sources on the internet. Most of these articles can be often found in huge media hubs such as groups of marketing in Facebook and LinkedIn, Technology Blogs, E-Magazines and other.

Moving on from the methodology, it is wise to continue by explaining the core subjects of the study that will lead to the purpose of creating tools for the betterment of the online presence of Mediterranean Palace Hotel.

## 4. Using content in online media

To start analyzing the ideas and concepts for the online marketing of the hotel, we need to understand why in every industry, companies need strong online presence. Is it something that is a trend or does it has a potential dynamic to change the way companies operate? I tend to agree towards the latter. The internet has changed how companies operate. Europe might be in the adopting period still (at least a great majority of the companies of traditional brick and mortar industries), but market needs, and competition push companies to fast their pace towards realization and implementation of an online marketing strategy.

In the words of D. Meerman Scott in the book, *The new rules of marketing and PR*; *“On the speaking circuit, I often hear people claim that online content such as blogs and news releases is really good only for technology companies. They believe that traditional bricks-and-mortar industries can’t make the strategy work. But I’ve always disagreed. Great content brands an organization as a trusted resource and calls people to action—to buy, subscribe, apply, or donate. And great content means that interested people return again and again. As a result, the organization succeeds, achieving goals such as adding revenue, building traffic, gaining donations, or generating sales leads”* (Meerman 2010, 20).

What Mr. Meerman says is that the way people make decisions has changed since we live in the Information Technology era. Information websites, blogs, videos, and so on, are there to make people aware of any product or service, it’s pros and cons, others’ peoples’ thoughts on such products or services, and similar companies that offer the same. Ninety percent of purchasing decisions begin online (Forrester 2009). That means that nowadays most of the users are using the internet and search engines to find information about their wants and needs and what suits them best. The Internet became a vast hub of opinions for different products and services which lead to a great value for the

customer; an online and worldwide forum of reviews of products and services, amongst other means.

The plan for the hotel must focus and should stay in line with the current trends of the markets. And as more and more companies trust the virtual world for their marketing strategies, new ideas, needs and trends begin to expand exponentially.

That leads to a great conclusion for a company: It is a game changer to focus on the Internet and its media. Online social networks, and communication hubs are a great start but the internet gives a company a variety of actions to take, which most of them, if used wisely and timely they do not cost money (or not much money in that respect) for the company.

Focus of the internet services:

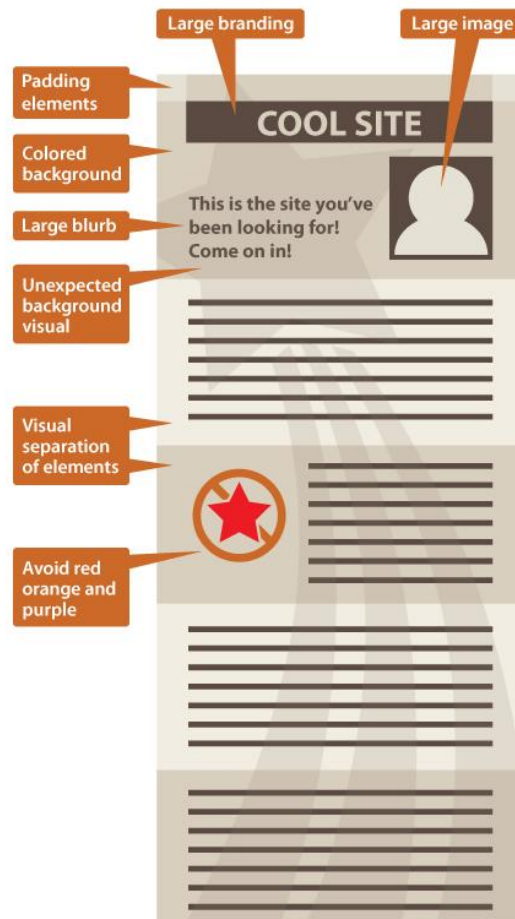
- Website (the “lobby” of the hotel to the online world)
- Social Networks (who is actually following you?)
- Mobile Tech (dynamic options for potential and current customers)
- Email and newsletters (make the hotel present at all times)

#### ***4.1. Creating and Keeping a Website***

A company’s website is a “showcase” of a company to the customer or the potential customer. Therefore the website must be a place that is designed to offer mobility and easy access. As a hotel, in real life, has a main entrance where the customer always sees first the reception, so he can reserve a room, a customer looking at the website of a hotel is basically looking the *virtual* reception of the hotel. Information must be easily found and the services must be up to date.

There are various techniques that can be used for that matter. We shall examine and consider applying a number of them because they are easily

implemented and easily created. In the image below we see a proposal by Josiah Mackenzie, for what a website should include in communicating an effective message to the viewer.



*Image 1: What a website should look like for the first introduction to the customer*

The first impression for a customer is everything. A study conducted for the BBC showed **“Internet users make up their minds about the quality of a website in the blink of an eye”** (BBC, 2006). Therefore what is on the first page of a website must be there for a reason and that reason is to keep the customer interested and stay more to the website to check the information given. There are numerous ways that this can be accomplished with. Keeping in mind the fact that the first glimpse of the customer is what determines whether he/she stays on the website.

As Josiah Mackenzie explains on his website ([hotelmarketingstrategies.com](http://hotelmarketingstrategies.com)), there are three principles that companies should follow, considering their website optimization.

- **Get that page loaded fast**
- **Visually WOW them**
- **Get them involved for future follow-up**

Those three principles only mean that, a website should be fast so that if the user has only some minutes to search for websites, he will not likely stay in one that takes 20 seconds to load, but he will prefer a website that takes 5 seconds to load. Furthermore, a user will most probably get impressed by a visually stunning website, with a lot of photos and a nice fit of colors, rather than a plain website with links and information only. And finally a user if he chooses to stay and browse your website, should directly be able to see and have the opportunity to follow a call-to-action (subscription, mailing list, contest, become a customer, buy a product/service).

Apart from regular customers the company must also focus on their ongoing or past customers. Therefore the company must include them in the “game” as well. It is easier to bring ongoing or past customers to the website. One wonders, “So why is this important?” It is important for the single reason that past and ongoing customers are more likely to check your website again. As J. Mackenzie claims ([hotelmarketingstrategies.com](http://hotelmarketingstrategies.com), 2011) if they do, they automatically help your company’s website. And they accomplish that simply by visiting your website. They instantly increase the website traffic. And let us not forget that past or ongoing customers are more profitable (since they have chosen your business already at least once).

At last, a great point to consider while focusing on the website of the company is search optimization (also known as SEO). Every keyword matters. A company has to make the website visible in all the major search engines (i.e.

google, bing) so even if a potential customer stumbles upon your website by accident, it is a good opportunity. While keeping in mind that, websites should use consistency in all their booking services, and that should apply to other channels and external parties (i.e. booking.com). A company should create an online image that will interest even a person that falls on the website by accident.

To make the term more simple and understandable to the normal user: SEO is the identifying what are people searching for related business activities, products and services, and then optimizing your website code and content accordingly.

ProspectMX, an Internet Marketing Strategy company explains the reasons for the need of SEO in businesses, an explanation with which I agree and I will explain the reasoning of this need below.

The reason we have to consider SEO for a website, is because, by paying close attention to where your website is ranking on the search engines, you can build up your efforts to enhance that performance, because relevant content to what customers search, will lead to relevant traffic to your website and make purchases more likely to happen.

SEO can help a company to create more leads and sales for a business, thus more customers coming to your website, it can also increase the ranking of your website, which means that search engines will more likely to refer your website to customers searching for tourism ("Tourism in Greece", for example, or "Hotels in Greece", can help bring extra customers to your website if SEO is applied and the website of the company can be found within a few search results), and it can also increase the revenue that comes from your website.

Combining means of user accessibility, visual factors, information flow and other means mentioned above, coupled with Search Engine Optimization, can

boost the image and effectiveness of online presence. Of course to the game we also have to include social media, and it is a whole chapter, mentioned later in this text.

### **A summary of the website goals**

Summarizing the previous ideas a website needs the following goals:

- Easily accessed and quickly loaded
- Direct access on information
- Appealing visuals
- Offer involvement (keep in touch)
- Re-invite past customers
- Website visibility through search engines
- Information consistency across all hubs
- Optimization for search engines

## **5. Content Marketing**

**Content marketing** is a term that uses nontraditional and innovative ways of publishing information in media such as blogs, social media and websites. The notion of content marketing has revolutionized the way companies operate in their marketing efforts. It is a way of improving brand loyalty by applying basic consistent information to the public. It encompasses all forms of content that add value to consumers, thereby directly or indirectly promoting a business, brand, products, or services (Gulenius, 10). It can occur both offline and online but the free simple tools of the web have given the ability to various companies worldwide to compete with each other not for market share but voice and influence (Gulenius, 10).

In order to understand the concept of Content Marketing, why and how to implement it, I will consider giving a brief explanation, and mention all the concepts, found in the e-book; “The concierge approach to Content Marketing”



by Josiah Mackenzie. The points of the e-book clarify the reasons for using content marketing, the steps and concepts to follow, the “right” content to be published and the “right” format of it.

### **Why should the hotel use the Content Marketing concept?**

As the internet became a part of the daily lives of billions of people worldwide (including every aspect of people from companies to customers), it has also become the primary information hub for most of the people worldwide who are basing their decisions on search engines before they perform a purchase on a product or service.

The importance of this fact makes it a primary goal for a company to improve their presence on the web. This can be done by adding content to your website and third party media. For the more content you publish on your website, the higher the chances that people will find you when they are searching for the information they need (Mackenzie 2010, 2).

When you publish content, it makes you a subject authority (Mackenzie 2010, 2). This of course can only be done by researching and knowing your information is valid. Content makes the customer educated for a specific subject before he or she performs a purchase. It also respectively makes you a valuable source to the customer. In this way, in addition to the high quality of services that the company provides (or should provide), content marketing has a long term pay-off.

### **Ways of publishing content online**

There are many ways to publish content. Companies use often non personal and non-friendly way of publishing information most of the times (Mackenzie 2010, 3). While a company wants to sound sound serious, it often uses “we” or “the X Company” and so on. Personalized content is always better (Mackenzie 2010, 3). Companies should avoid sounding corporate while they use content as it is clearer and more understandable. The information should

come from one person rather than “the company”. The information should include various information media from photos and videos to a blog and text that has your own voice. It is boring and rather tiring to read plain text with no enhancement of other media.

Promotion is essential in every action the hotel takes. Promotion of the content you have published can be performed during inbound customer inquiries. Additionally it can be sent to new email subscribers. Furthermore it can be given to customers after a reservation or a sale. And lastly, it can be promoted proactively through the social media (Mackenzie 2010, 10)

Moving on, we find another concept that gets rather famous as technology and the social media gain more popularity. It is called crowd sourcing, or guest sourcing and it is a highly interesting concept of marketing.

### **Guestsourcing**

**Guestsourcing** is letting the customer become a content publisher for your own company. It is also referred to as **Crowdsourcing**.

Using guestsourcing you can enable your customer to add media such as photos, videos, wikis (on destination information pages), reviews for your hotel and such information. This idea creates a sense of contribution to the customer. So the next time you get a positive feedback, ask your customer to create some online contribution for your company. In this way the company can leverage the customer to an online contributor (Mackenzie 2010, 6).

It is rather easy to promote action for your customers. While they feel like contributors they can very easily post pictures, videos, write texts and reviews or even comment about your services in third party media, and the social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Flickr, Google Plus, booking.com, Foursquare, tripadvisor and others).

## **Content to be published**

Below we see a list of different concepts of content that can be possible published in the website of the hotel, or even on the social media, so that the customers have information about a lot of details concerning the city, their interests, their needs and other useful data.

- Flight information
  - Widgets for customers to check their flight information
- Airport transportation options
  - Available airline companies
  - Cheaper options
- City's best hotels
  - Who is your competitor?
  - It honors your company to mention/acknowledge them
- Best ways to get around the city
  - Bus
  - city and regional
  - Taxi
  - Train
  - Average prices for those transportation options
- Guest reviews and photos
  - Media and information by excited customers
- Boutiques and galleries
  - Where to buy stuff
  - Where to enjoy art
  - Best places in the city
- Places to eat
  - Taverns
  - Fast food
  - Restaurants
  - Other options (patisseries, cafés etc)
- Special events for every period

- Concerts
- Conferences
- Other shows
- Climate (necessary clothing)
  - 4 season information of the climate in and out of the city
  - Clothes to bring
- Best Wi-Fi places
  - Cafés and places with public hotspots for internet access
- Exercise options (gyms, running and bicycle paths)
  - Fields for sports activities (basketball, tennis etc)
  - The bicycle paths of Thessaloniki
  - Equipment rental options
- Best Places to photograph
  - Must check places around the city
- Interesting day trips in the city
  - Where to visit on short stays
  - For people with limited transportation options

This list is directly taken from the E-Book, The concierge approach to Content Marketing (Mackenzie 2010, 7)

### **Format to be used**

A Visitor's Guide section included in the website is a good start for content publishing. A well prepared study of the availability and accessibility around the city is a start for the hotel to help their customers. A second idea is adding information through blogging. Little bits of information at a time can add up and create a useful database for tips, information bits and knowledge on certain subjects (Mackenzie 2010, 9).

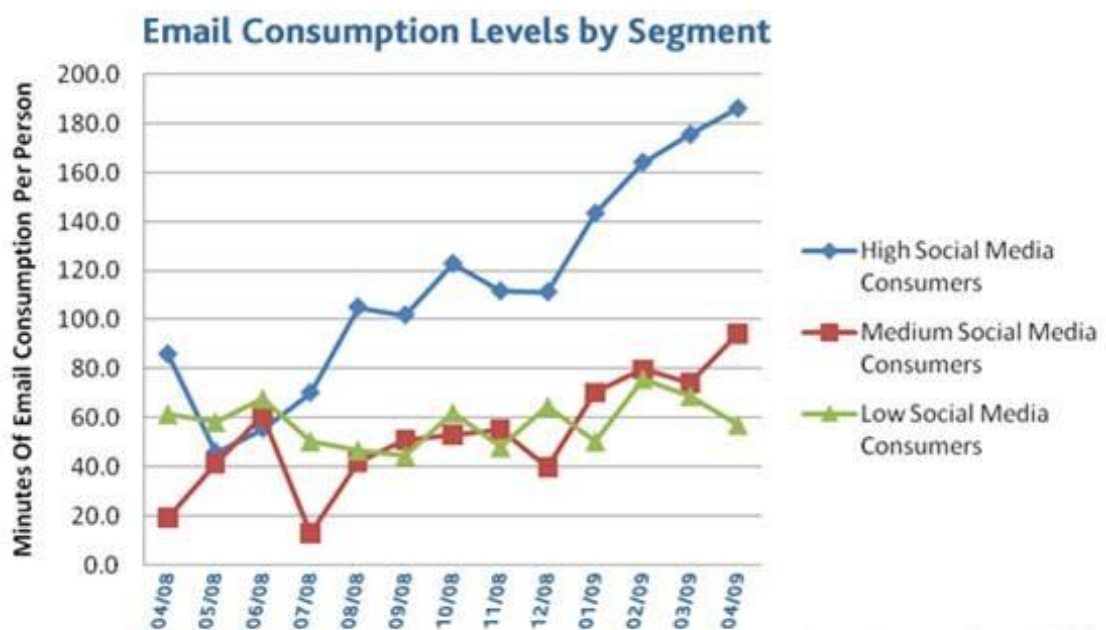
Thirdly, you can always add a PDF summary of the most important information on your website. The customers can use this as a helpful guide while they are on the road. A forth option is an SMS text with specific

information. The last idea is Mobile Applications. Create an application that can share information to the customers so that they are informed and updated with your current trends, news, offers and events (Mackenzie 2010, 9).

## 6. Marketing on the Social Media

*“The perfect solution is to serve each consumer individually. The problem? There are 7 billion of them...”*

This has been said by a CMO (chief marketing operator) in a recent survey of IBM (published in reuters.com). According to the study performed by IBM, 82% of chief marketing officers still rely on traditional market research to shape marketing strategies, while only 26 percent track blogs and just 40 percent track any online communications (reuters.com).



*The graph above is showing how much time average users spend on reading emails, and the increasing numbers in a span of a year.*

Below we can take a look at some of the pros and cons of Social Media marketing, from an article in Social Media Today by Matt Ambrose. The list is

explained briefly by me in order to understand better the meanings of the points

### **PROS of Social Media Marketing**

- **Relationship Building** – Building relationship in one to one basis with the customer creates a powerful tool of interaction and gain of trust
- **Word of Mouth** – Word of mouth becomes literal in this form of communication, since the word is put out there for the whole world to see
- **Presence** – Social media is where every customer is on, nowadays.
- **Low cost of Entry** – The costs in establishing visibility in social media is low to minimal.
- **Customer Service** – People these days post on blogs and recommendation websites whenever they have problems, no longer relying on email and phone.

### **CONS of Social Media Marketing**

- **Late ROI** – It can take months to establish a right image and gain popularity in social media
- **Time Consuming** – Constant feedback is required since social media is often attributed as a conversation tool
- **Risk of negative feedback** – There is always the risk of customers being negative about your products or services and that can affect your image
- **Loss of Control** – The content you publish is out there for the world to read, and it is subjected to everyone's interpretation. Therefore it is critical to know that you publish the right content online.

### **6.1. Facebook**

A definition given in CNET describes what Facebook really is. According to the author: *"Facebook is a social networking service that lets you connect with friends, co-workers, and others who share similar interests or who have*

*common backgrounds. Many use it as a way to stay in touch after finishing school, or as a way to share their life publicly” (Cnet, 2011)*

Below we see some astounding statistics that grow the time this research is written. They are provided directly from the website of Facebook and they give a clear picture of Facebook’s impact in the daily lives of normal people, consumers and companies.

***Every 20 minutes:***

- More than 1 million links are shared
- More than 1.8 million status updates are made
- More than 2.7 million photos are uploaded
- More than 10 million comments are posted

The Facebook press page gives us a lot of good additional statistics:

- More than 750 million active users
- 50% of active users log on to Facebook in any given day
- Average user has 130 friends
- Average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events
- Entrepreneurs and developers from more than 190 countries build with Facebook Platform
- Since social plugins launched in April 2010, an average of 10,000 new websites integrate with Facebook every day
- More than 2.5 million websites have integrated with Facebook, including over 80 of comScore's U.S. Top 100 websites and over half of comScore's Global Top 100 websites

A recent report by ExactTarget and CoTweet found 2 primary reasons why people “like” brands on Facebook; for discounts and as a “social badge” (. 40% of Facebook users “like” brands for exclusive discounts and offers, while 39% of them follow pages to show their friends they support a brand – identity statement. (Melinda Varley, 2011)

Another report by Seventh Art Media has found that content is what intrigues users the most. A clearly nice and attractive picture or a catchy phrase can work on the users and connect to them personally. Images are winning ground concerning the rest of the content posted on the platform (Katie Clapp, 2011)

Below we study some simple ways and examples of how Facebook Pages can be used from hotels and other companies to attract, engage and find new customers. Hospitalitynet.org explains those 5 easy ways to turn the company's Facebook Page into a dynamic place to attract existing and prosper customers (Mackenzie, 2011)

### **Facebook as an exclusive source**

An example of this concept is hotel Le Seven. This Parisian hotel uses Facebook for its exclusive hotel news and available room rates. With this concept the hotel has extended its fan base up to 12.000 users-followers.

### **Facebook as a local community hub**

The Poets Cove Resort, Spa & Marina, uses facebook for connecting with their guests and engaging with the local community. It is easily understandable why there are no potential customers who would like to use the accommodation services of the hotel, but we can sure attract them with deals and offering our other services, like restaurant and spa.

### **Facebook as a local guide**

Distrikt Hotel NYC uses Facebook to show to the guests and whoever else is following them on the platform, what is going on in the city. If your Facebook page is a source like that, it is likely that users will share it with their friends and colleagues.



### **Facebook as a sales tool**

The Beacon Hotel in South Beach uses their welcome tab on their Facebook Page, for promoting special offers for their guests. Special Offers is a nice way to promote your services on social media. It doesn't have to specifically be a discount, or a coupon for a reduced price, it can also be a package deal that is tempting for potential and past customers.

### **Facebook as a website**

One & Only Palmilla uses advanced design to design a sensation like browsing on their website. This can be done by certain tools on Facebook. Showing beautiful photography and videos can touch your customers emotionally.

The use of content marketing by all those companies used in this case study, in order to attract future, existing and past customers. Using these ways they are making their presence known to the public, through the powerful ways of social networking.

### **More ideas for Facebook**

The 10 things that companies should do on Facebook, but most do not. This is a list found on the website of Great Hotels of the World (Brooke Jester, 2011).

- **Promote your visual identity through videos**

Videos are more powerful than pictures and nothing sells better than a video presentation of your hotel or small niche videos for your services uploaded on the internet. If you upload them on Youtube you will get extra hits and search engines will track your website, Facebook page, or videos easier.

- **Facebook Insights**

Facebook has a great tracking and statistics system that companies can use for their pages. Through Facebook Insights you can track what posts are having the most clicks, likes, and comments, who has your company page

“hidden” from their news feed and such tools. This will enable your company to measure the online content publishing in a sophisticated way and adapt the marketing content strategy.

- **Facebook Places**

Make sure your hotel is listed in the Facebook Places as a “Hotel”, and encourage customers to check in through Facebook, with material incentive such as a free drink at the bar, or a voucher for the restaurant, or even a free meal if there is a buffet dinner available.

- **Run competitions**

Engage customers in a way that they feel like contributors and participants. Make a competition where you give away 5 free dinners at your hotel’s restaurant, for the users who share your page in their network, for example.

- **Use Facebook Questions**

Ask questions to your audience to find out what they really think about your company. Ask feedback about your services. Ask what extra you can do to better your services as a hotel. Share specific knowledge to the audience and guide your audience to the right direction.

- **Use Facebook Advertising**

Reach the right targeted audience with advertising in Facebook. You can choose to target audience by location, by age or interests. You can promote your page or website to millions of potential customers and easier build a community around your page.

Choose if you want to pay when people see the ad or if they click on it. Even if people see the ad randomly on their Facebook account, providing some right and short info of your business can help them get interested in you. But if they choose to click on the ad and get redirected to your page or website then, you

have to remember about the principles of attraction that were mentioned above when talking of the website.

- **Allow users to book directly from Facebook**

Make offers specifically for Facebook users and connect this social media with your booking engine by adding a widget on the Facebook page.

## **6.2. Twitter**

What is Twitter? The website itself gives a clear definition of this specific service. *“Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that allows you answer the question, ‘What are you doing?’ by sending short text messages 140 characters in length, called ‘tweets’, to your friends, or ‘followers’”*.

There are various ways to use Twitter to the advantage of the company. Since it has also millions of users, Twitter is a stronghold of potential advertisement, and a place to reach your customers, or potential customers easily and without too much hard work. Just think about what people want to know, either about your business or about general issues in hospitality and apply those fundamentals to your posts in Twitter. Let us examine some ways of using the service. In an article in SocialMediaToday, there is a list of ways to use Twitter and we can go through them in order to understand the right usage of it (Akshay Brijkrishan, 2011). The points of the list are taken directly from the article, but I am explaining them further in order to give a good explanation of each point.

- **Talk about experiences, views, opinions that are central to your brand or personality.** So a hotel should focus on the Hospitality industry and talk about anything, from a scandal to a new segment of customers emerging in their country.

- **Be funny.** This works amazingly well on the internet, and people get to often like this kind of attitude.
- **Ask questions so that people respond.** This will increase your mentions and more people will get to see you.
- **Make it a habit to tweet.** It would be ideal to tweet 4-8 times per day (always with space intervals).
- **Use major trends to your forte.** If there is a trend that can be used by your brand or related to the industry use it for your own benefit.
- **Leave trails.** Leave links to your twitter profile every time you make a blog post or a comment on the World Wide Web.
- **Make it a habit to respond to those who follow you.** As simple as it sounds, thank the people who follow you and simply follow them back or ask them what drove them in this decision.
- **Retweeting is a fantastic option to use to share information.** Be sure to mention them as you would want that to happen to your company too, when someone is Retweeting a post of yours.

### **6.3. LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is probably the best networking tool for companies and business people so the presence of the hotel in this medium is a must. The right presence is even more important. Before we examine the ways to build the hotel's image in LinkedIn, I will put a definition about this medium, found in SMEmarketing.com. According to the definition, *"LinkedIn is an online networking community for business people. Having been launched in 2003, it now has over 90 million users and is fast becoming a central marketing and*

*networking tool for any tech-savvy business*". (SMEmarketing, Internet Marketing Glossary, 2011)

So what are the ways to enhance the hotel's presence on this medium? Below there are ways listed, a list given by Are Morch, a Hotel Advisor and Social Media Strategist. Mr. Morch gives excellent points for how to use LinkedIn and I am explaining them further for better understanding.

- **Building Brand Equity**

This is essential for a business and LinkedIn has tools that can really help the company with that. A business networking tool like LinkedIn can enhance the Brand Equity, in other words, it can improve the image of the hotel bridging thousands of professionals in touch with your company.

- **Professional Presence**

Company Pages allow you to present a professional presence on LinkedIn. If your peers have a page too they can be linked to your company and this increased the company's image. People can then join your page, share it, talk about it, talk in it and be in touch with your company.

- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

Add valuable information on your personal profile and company profile, related to the hospitality industry in order to increase the search engine optimization. Social Media Optimization (SMO) is one of the pillars to get ranked high on Search Engines today.

- **Lead Generation**

Lead Generation is created by engaging with your network and peers through LinkedIn Group, and answering and asking questions through LinkedIn Answer. Being active in such media is a key to create an image that shows a hotel that cares for its customers.

- **Social CRM**

Relationships matter the most and you can easily keep track of them in LinkedIn. While you are busy building your image, be sure to check and "spy" what your customers think and say, also what your competitors say, because

based on this, you can improve your services and the customer experience on your business.

- **Consumer Engagement with Network and Peers**

Involvement through crowd sourcing techniques can help the hotel and its image, as the customer becomes empowered to contribute. Ask people to talk about your hotel, ask them to share photos of your business, and publish some nice feedback about your services. You can as well reward them for such actions.

- **Response and Reputation Management**

Listen to your customers, response timely and effectively. This is a key to success. Talk and engage to disgruntled customers, offer them compensation, offer them some free services. Be not afraid to give something for free, because it's better to lose a few € than a few customers.

- **Market Segments**

- Find new and attractive market segments through LinkedIn;
- People (profiles)
- Updates
- Jobs
- Companies (company pages)
- Answers
- Inbox
- Groups

#### **6.4. Google Plus**

Another social network and the latest attempt of Google to get into the social life of Internet users is Google Plus or Google+. As an article in IBTimes points out; *"The service allows users to share photos, links and videos with friends, family and acquaintances. The key difference between Google's offering and similar social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, is the user's ability to target their sharing with specific people instead of the default "share with everyone" approach"* (Gordon Macrae, 2011)

### **6.5. *Blogging***

For companies who do not fancy website updates a very clever way to keep your customers with up to date information is Blogging. It is a clever way to renew the information stream of a company through a blog. Having opinions from the people of the company can create a trusted and personal approach to the customers, which engaging them, and encouraging them to take part in the discussion.

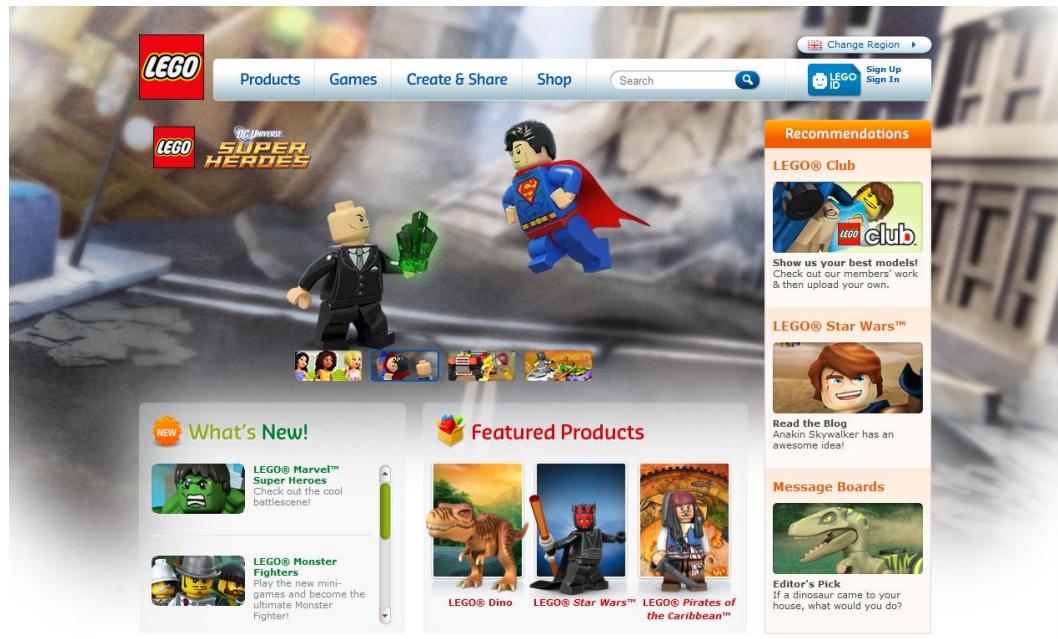
Blogging is a clever way to automate process and updates in social media like Facebook and Twitter. For example, if you create and publish a new blog post, it can automatically be posted with a short link in Facebook and Twitter.

## **7. Proposals for Mediterranean Hotel Palace**

So far we have gone through major subject of technology trends in marketing these days. We have seen recommendations on how companies should use their websites, what relevant information they should provide, how successful companies use their social media to engage their user base and what social media are worth engaging in. All this information is relevant in order to understand the critical issue of building an online presence.

Below we see an example of a traditional, brick and mortar company, Lego. It is well known for their building blocks games that have amazed the majority of children. The website nowadays is full of animations and interactive experience, a way to keep children astonished and want to buy more.

There are more interactive ways to engage the customers. Lego for example uses game experiences where children can create online lego artwork and share it to the world. They can also become members of the Lego club a way to engage in a loyal community of customers.

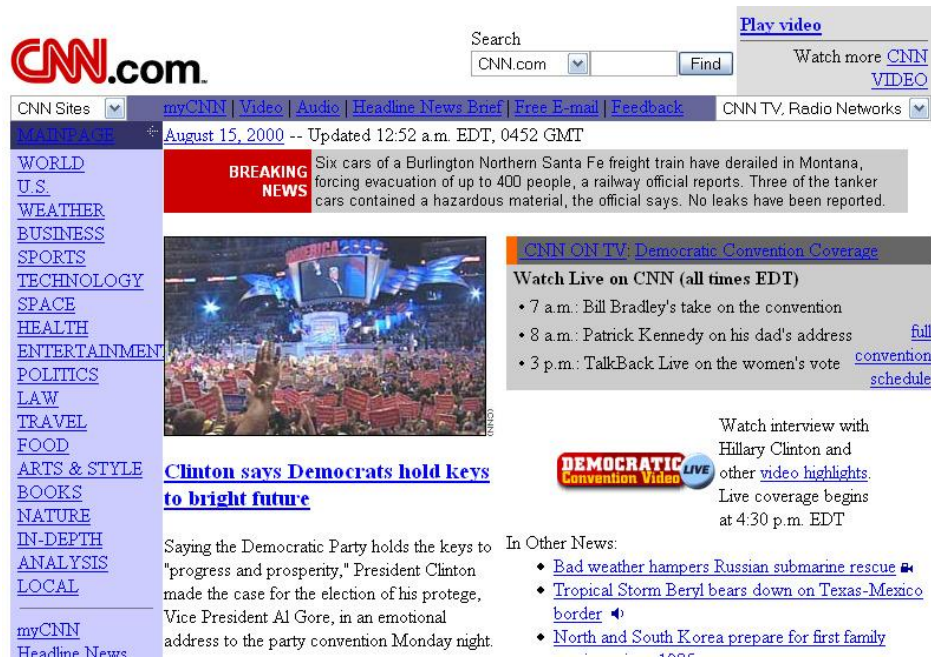


*Lego website as of 24.04.2012*

If we take another traditional company for example, CNN is the leading news source of global events which was founded in US. Eight years ago their website was doing its best to keep some relevant information up to date. However we cannot compare it to the today's CNN website and we can see how long they have come along. Not only they engage on TV but their online presence is as well important with millions of users reading their articles.

In previous years the majority of companies would ignore their online presence but I believe it was the users and their massive involvement in online places such as Facebook and other social media that have made companies thinking of innovative ways to attract more people.

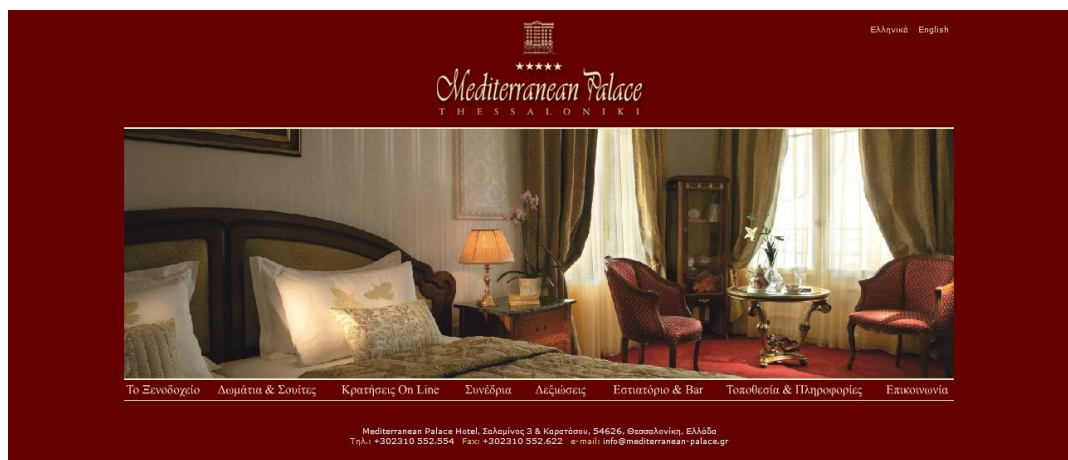




CNN website, 2000.

## 7.1. Website proposals

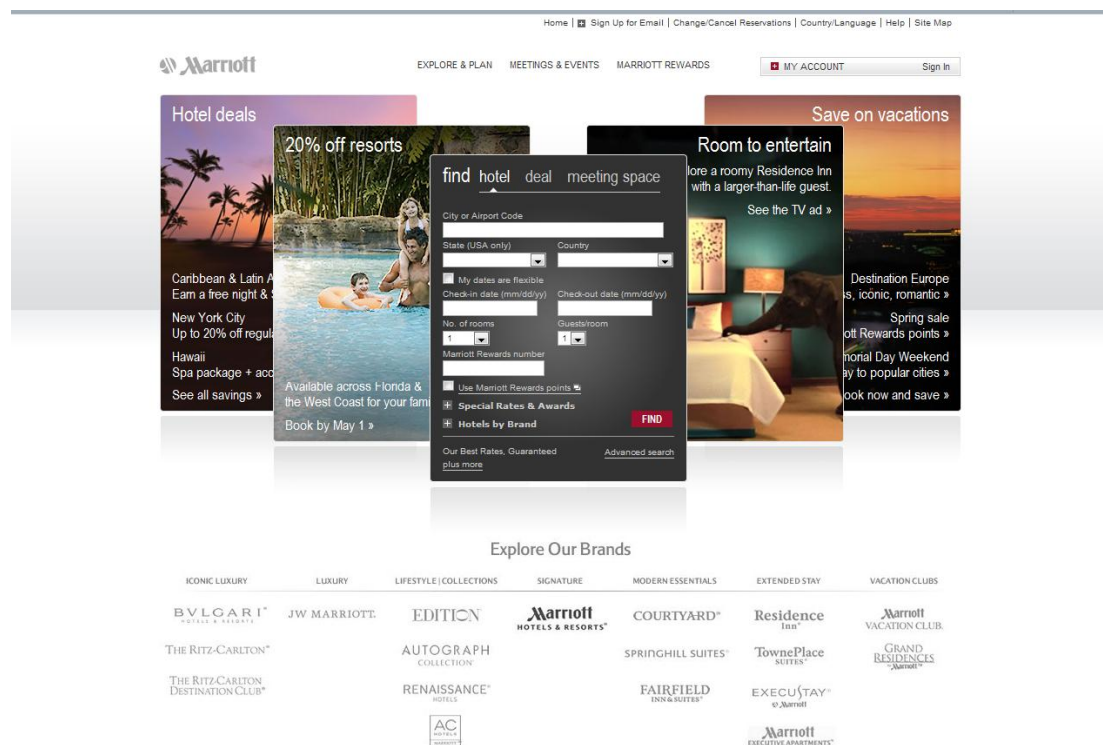
Mediterranean Palace Hotel has to make some major improvements on their website. This could be a starting point for boosting their online image. Although the website is functional, which is important, there are several considerations to be made. Below I am going to list my individual thoughts and proposals for improvements, in order to help the hotel update their online presence. Firstly, we shall take a look at the present website.



Mediterranean Palace Hotel first page as of 24.05.2012

## Website case: Marriott

As we see, the website of the hotel has a lot of room for improvement. A quick example is to ditch the front page that contains only images and links. The front page should contain more information, and at least the user should be able to see the booking service as the first service available to him. If we take a look at the Marriott's website we understand that they have thought about the same.



*Marriott Hotels' website as of 24.04.2012*

What else the Marriott hotels website has done, is that they have created a minimal website and they have given certain priorities to some aspects that customers care about the most. First of all the information is central.

The user's attention gets drawn to the center of the booking system since it is listed with color while the rest of the information that might come in a second glance and not of such importance to the main user, is grayed so that it is more neutral. The booking system which is the first thing the user observes, and behind that, with color to draw the attention still, there are offers, deals,

and exclusives. If we explore the website of Marriott further we see that they have also tried to keep up to date with the current trends of online media. They have dedicated phone applications for their hotel, plus they engage with customer in a Blog, Facebook and Twitter.

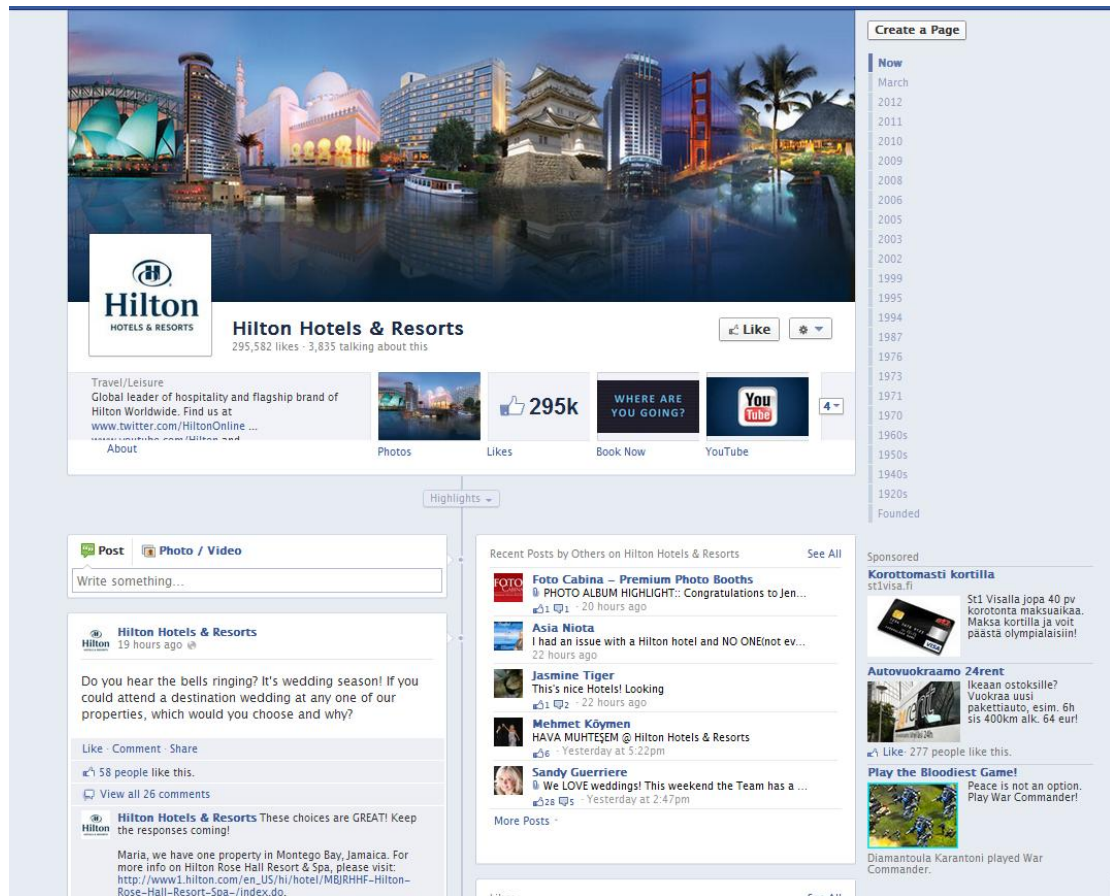
In the end Marriott's website is a fine example of a hotel website. Keeping the relevant information on high priority, but at the same time, provide as much more information as possible, and all that, in the very front page of the website.

## ***7.2. Social Media proposals***

When it comes to Social Media there are certain businesses that has done things better than others, and in the Accommodation industry, there are certainly very well done examples of Hotels that have engaged in Social Media successfully. I have found examples that in my own opinion have adapted the most and they are the leaders in engagement with their customers and fan base.

### **The Facebook case: Hilton Hotels**

Hilton Hotels have an amazing Facebook page. Apart for certain specialty hotels from Hilton that have their own page in Facebook, the general volume of the hotels is served through a specific page in Facebook, with a user base of almost 300.000 followers. Facebook has changed the structure of the pages since I have started writing this study however everyone has to adopt to the trending technology and their changes and so do I. Coming back to the subject, Facebook pages now look almost the same as profile pages for personal accounts, with various differences on the structures, such as added features, insights and some other tools.



*Hilton Hotels Facebook page as of 24.04.2012*

Hilton Hotels' Facebook page is a great example on how hotels should use their Facebook Pages. An amazing image, colorful and tempting, showing off major landmarks and places that Hilton Hotels exist, is used as a cover photo. Of course as most of the businesses, Hilton Hotels use their profile image for the page to display the logo, something that is immediately recognizable.

Furthermore, since Facebook Pages now allows people to create applications and mini websites inside Facebook pages, Hilton Hotels has created several small services to give their Facebook page the feeling of an independent website inside Facebook. For example, apart from photos and likes which are general for all pages, they have created several small applications for booking, videos, their Hilton Honors alliance information, and other social media links to connect with the business.

In order to interact much more with customers, Hilton Hotels are regularly posting on their Facebook Timeline, news, offers, deals and exclusives, as well as promoting their hotels from time to time with stunning images and catchy content.

As a result we see that this is a very easy way to create an alternative website on a place where most of the people are likely to hang out, Facebook.

Mediterranean Palace Hotel should implement a similar strategy that would follow certain steps:

- Create an application for online booking directly from Facebook
- Create applications for linking the other social media they engage as a hotel
- Include videos, images and relevant media for sharing
- Post offers, deals and exclusives
- Create other applications that can work as information hubs


### **The Twitter case: Ritz-Carlton**

Continuing giving examples for the hotel as ways to interact in social media, I am going to mention Twitter. As a social media twitter in its core is very simple. You write a message no longer than 160 characters and you send it to your followers or fans. Companies often use this service to interact with customers, reach them with small news, promotions, sales, and feedback.

I am going to present the Ritz-Carlton twitter account as a great example of a hotel to use twitter. Ritz-Carlton has a user base of almost 20.500 users and has more than 12.000 tweets! They are keeping the audience busy providing them with information, deals, offers and promotion of their hotels.



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**227** FOLLOWING

**20,476** FOLLOWERS


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**Tweets**



**The Ritz-Carlton** @RitzCarlton

Did you know that Sea Turtles are on the endangered species list? [miamidade.gov/ecoadventures/...](http://miamidade.gov/ecoadventures/)

58m




**The Ritz-Carlton** @RitzCarlton

Good Morning from The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, Miami! Beautiful, blue skies today pic: [twitter.com/kHQvAb2](http://twitter.com/kHQvAb2)

2h


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Everyone have a great night! Make sure to follow us on our twitter page, @RC\_REYNOLDS #georgia #lakeoconee [pic.twitter.com/3CFzsF0o](http://pic.twitter.com/3CFzsF0o)

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*Ritz-Carlton Twitter page as of 24.04.2012*

In the Ritz-Carlton case, on Twitter we are observing how a company can interact frequently with their customers or fan base. The hotel is updating their messages every few hours, with promotions, deals, and other material to their customers. They also interact with their customers, as it can work also as a feedback channel.

Mediterranean Palace Hotel can implement the same strategy for twitter or a similar, with a rule of thumb, a few tweets per day. In this way the hotel is constantly reminding their followers that they are active and they are providing them with info on certain deals. They can also provide additional information about festivals and other happenings in the area of Thessaloniki, since they are not a multinational hotels chain and they can focus well on that.

### **7.3. *Other Media: How to use them***

In order to engage audience in as bigger perspective as possible, Mediterranean Palace Hotel has to also consider other media. For example, it is commonly used that companies keep an active blog on their websites. It does not have to be updated every day but whenever some big news happens from the company, they can be easily added there.

Moving on, presence on LinkedIn is equally important, and as it is considered a B2B social network it is equally important as others. LinkedIn is a professional network and has its own benefits. For example working as a way to keep existing customers informed about your company is a good way and also it builds slowly the brand of the hotel from the point of staff and customer members since they can recommend the hotel and its own staff.

Finally keeping in mind Google plus is also an option to consider. Since most of people who own a Google account, have Google plus by default, it is quite easy to engage in this media as well. A good and easy example is to enable Facebook or twitter updates on Google plus. With this option whatever you post on the other media is getting submitted on Google plus automatically. Of course the same can happen for other media as well. For example linking your Twitter to LinkedIn can do the same and post all your tweets to LinkedIn.

A last option to consider is making sure that the company is listed under Google Places or Places in Facebook. Adding the relevant info there is a great tool for people who are looking for your company, or people who are just searching for information in the city of Thessaloniki. People can also tag themselves geographically when they are on your hotel which let their friends know about it.

## 8. Conclusion

Originally, before starting thinking about the subject of the study I was much interested in marketing in general. It was this interest that let me doing basic online research about the subject which led me to finding about social media, websites and how there are new ways of conducting marketing.

Initially, I have realized that most (if not all) hotels in Greece, have a limited, or non functional presence on the web. And not only that, they also have websites that are not functional. Lest assured that, companies in Greece except tech companies, seemed to ignore Social Media all together. This is when I knew that I had to write about this. And so, after contacting the hotel, the feelings were mutual about the need of such research.

Therefore I first asked myself: What is the core problem in this situation? The answer was simple. The core problem for the hotel was the Online Presence itself. Therefore I started dividing the online presence into several paths.

- Website/Blog
- Social Media
- Third party media

To create an all around approach, I have decided to focus on where the hotel should focus more. Since I have noticed that they have been listed in third party media such as booking.com, this narrowed down my perspective on providing information for websites and social media. After that I was able to exhibit ways or examples on how the hotel should proceed in conducting marketing online. In the end I am positive that I have chosen the right methodology for this subject, which is what many companies would do as well in my opinion. In addition I believe that the whole result of the suggestions that I have proposed will help the hotel further with their plans of marketing.



And in this point at the end of this study I would like to point out that it is important for companies to shift their thinking towards nontraditional marketing and PR methods. The internet has a greater power than TV in these years and the word of mouth in social media has the potential of a great outreach that most companies would never achieve in previous years. Therefore with this study and the tools mentioned throughout it, the hotel can possibly achieve a wider audience and/or strengthen the already established one.

In conclusion I would like to point out the fact that this study is not tailor made to fit only Mediterranean Palace Hotel. This study can be used by Grand Hotel Palace as well which shares management strategies, but it could be also used by hotels and other business around the world. The tools of the study are not location specific or industry specific, and the reason that I have chosen examples of hotels is only to go in a compatible mode with the management of a hotel. Companies all around the world no matter what industry, be it software, or products company, or manufacturers are using the same tools and try to engage in massive scale with their audiences.

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